

AN ASIAN HORNET, *VESPA SIMILLIMA XANTHOPTERA* (HYMENOPTERA: VESPIDAE) IN NORTH AMERICA

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While examining wasps in the Royal B.C. Museum's collection, I came across a large specimen standing under the name *Vespa crabro* L., the European Hornet. The label indicated that the insect had been collected by Mr. A. Rumsby at Shawnigan Lake, B.C., just north of Victoria, in August 1977. Wanting to know more about the circumstances surrounding the capture, I contacted him.

According to Mr. Rumsby, the hornet had been seen flying around raspberry bushes in his garden for two days before it was collected. Because of its notable size the specimen was considered unusual and was brought to Dr. Robert Carcasson, then Curator of Entomology at this museum, who identified it as *Vespa crabro*. I was not so sure. The specimen did not have the bold yellow and brown abdominal pattern of *V.c. germana*, the subspecies introduced and established in eastern North America (Akre *et al.* 1980); rather it was a uniform golden-brown colour. This eliminated the possibility of the wasp having arrived in British Columbia from eastern North America; nevertheless, perhaps it was a member of one of the other subspecies that range as far east in Asia as Japan.

After considerable sleuthing by several entomologists, the specimen was finally identified as a queen of a different species, *Vespa simillima xanthoptera* Cameron, a taxon found in the Japanese archipelago south of Hokkaido. The nominate subspecies occurs in Hokkaido, Korea, and the southeastern U.S.S.R. (R.S. Jacobson, *in litt.*). This is the first record of the species in North America.

Ships carrying lumber from Canada to Japan regularly call at Cowichan Bay, 10 km due north of Shawnigan Lake. Probably this specimen or its ancestors arrived from Japan on such transport; the fact that it was a queen flying late in the summer suggests that a colony may have developed in the area. Thus, it is possible that a population of these hornets occurred, at least at one time, near Shawnigan Lake, although in the eleven years since the capture of the specimen, no others have been reported.

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REFERENCES

- Akre, R.D., A. Greene, J.F. MacDonald, P.J. Landolt, and H.G. Davis. 1980. Yellowjackets of America north of Mexico. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agriculture Handbook No. 552. 102 pp.